

AIR COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE

AIR UNIVERSITY

**ON THE JOB EDUCATION: AN ALTERNATIVE FOR SPECIAL OPERATIONS
FORCES OFFICERS**

by

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Abstract

In today's dynamic environment, special operations forces (SOF) officers continue to provide a unique capability to execute complex missions. SOF officers deploy to areas where they must understand the culture, communicate effectively in a foreign language, and develop relationships with interagency organizations. SOF officers must have other avenues besides training and combat to learn these areas. The operational tempo for SOF officers is high and their total number in the military relatively low compared to conventional officers. Conventional officers have educational institutions at the major level that prepare them to understand today's operational environment, but SOF officers have few options. Creating an education program for SOF officers centered on the three aspects of cultural awareness, foreign language competence, and interagency relationships will capitalize on SOF's uniqueness. In addition, the education program will meet the major level education requirement in the most effective means.

This paper seeks to answer the question of creating an education program for SOF officers by combining elements already in use by the military. The research looks to fill the learning gap for SOF officers by finding courses and programs to enable them to maximize personal and professional growth. Using Army Special Forces as the initial group to develop an alternative education program will shed insight on how to support the SOF community. Understanding past and present SOF operations along with their education requirements emphasizes the need for a SOF specific education program. Comparing several military education programs available to SOF officers will help to identify certain aspects of those programs that can become a part of the SOF curriculum. Researching sources that offer cultural competence and further foreign language training adds to the SOF curriculum. Analyzing the

Army's view on the education process for officers along with their views on distance learning determines the feasibility of fulfilling the professional military education requirement.

Satisfying the professional military education requirement is achievable by displaying the Air Force's distance learning program for majors. These areas provide flexible answers to solving the issue of creating an alternative "on-the-job" education for SOF officers. The research lays out different ways to assemble various parts of select military programs to offer an efficient and effective academic program designed to educate SOF officers for their distinctive missions.

Introduction

Special operations forces (SOF) are operating in diverse ranges of operations more consistently in recent times than ever before. From the 1980's to the early 1990's special operations forces played limited roles in our nation's defense. Some of the conflicts and wars included small engagements against Iranian forces in the Persian Gulf, the ousting of Panamanian dictator Manuel Noreiga during Operation JUST CAUSE, and against Iraqi forces in the Persian Gulf War in 1991.¹ During the Persian Gulf War special operations forces were fortunate to get called into action because few knew how to employ them in large scale war. Once roles and missions in supporting conventional forces were determined, special operations forces performed exceptionally. Special operations continued throughout the 1990's to engage in small conflicts. Because of their utility, regional combatant commanders and their staffs considered special forces "an essential element for achieving US national security objectives" and the "force of choice for many diverse combat and peacetime missions" by the Government Accounting Office.² This attitude was a prelude of things to come for SOF.

The demand on SOF now is greater than in the 1980s and 1990s. The operations SOF conducts affect the full range of military operations. Time after time, special operations forces have proven their worth by the ability to shape the battlefield through various means. The environment and adversary may change, but SOF readily adapts to defeat or degrade the capabilities of the enemy. Their ability to operate in changing environments highlights the capabilities special operations forces bring to the battle. Today, the contributions of special operations forces to the nation's security are witnessed all over the globe. Special operations forces remain agile while fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan in each phase of military operations: shape, deter, seize initiative, dominate, stabilize, and enable civil authority.³ The missions they

conduct have implications at every level of war while operating with a small signature. In a single theatre, one can see SOF counter insurgencies, spearhead a major operation, try to suppress a civil war, build schools, train host nation military personnel, conduct peacekeeping missions, and provide aid while fighting the nation's wars. Most recently, SOF were assisting the people of Haiti recover from a devastating earthquake. These contingencies, crises, and wars are not like the previous ones SOF faced in Vietnam and later. Tasks may be called the same name, but due to this the leaders are taxed even more.

Missions today require SOF officers and soldiers to be quick, adaptive thinkers. They must be able to use indirect as well as direct measures to achieve objectives. In 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review, one of the key points in developing future military leaders is "building expertise in foreign language, regional, and cultural skills."⁴ To develop future military leaders and ascertain knowledge to be prepared for a full range of complex missions, institutions must take a different approach to the education process, especially for SOF field grade officers. Today, a more dynamic battlefield requires leaders to become adaptive thinkers to meet the daily challenges of the world. Where does a leader refine his cognitive processes and gain valuable tools that will help him on the battlefield? For most of the conventional force it is through the military educational programs. But as the battlefield changes, there must be an education program that applies to SOF officers where they can continue to grow relationships and build upon essentials tools that will help them for the remainder of their careers.

Description of the problem and its key issues

There are many opportunities for a field grade SOF officer to receive an education in the military today. These programs offer much to a SOF officer to meet his mid-career educational requirements. Many education programs provide opportunities to increase an officer's

knowledge on interagency relationships, cultural awareness, and language training. While opportunities exist to learn in these three areas in various programs, they are not all together in a single academic program. Reorganizing several existing education programs to include these three areas into a single curriculum will lead to a more concise learning environment for SOF majors. An Army Special Forces (SF) officer serving as an interagency fellow stated, “Building and maintaining strong relationships between the United States Army and its governmental partners is essential to bringing forth a positive outcome in the war on terror.”⁵ The interagency relationship is just as important for SOF, but of equal importance is becoming regional experts and speaking a language. The ability for SOF to be innovative in education will benefit its officers and may lead to other positive educational opportunities. This will help SOF officers remain intellectually capable to solve complex problems. While SOF consists of a large number of officers from all branches of the military services, the focus of this paper is on the education of Army SF officers with consideration given to the rest of SOF. It is important to make effective use of the time a SOF officer is using for education. A two-year academic program for majors of special operations should focus on interagency relationships, cultural awareness, and foreign language training as an integral part of fulfilling their education.

Why SOF officers need an alternative education program

SOF officers perform tasks not necessarily similar to conventional military officers. SOF officers conduct missions that require them to understand the operational and strategic environment through a different lens. The lens SOF looks through is understood simply by the nature of how they operate. While conventional forces normally work within large formations in an operations area with many other supporting units, SOF teams operate in small teams. Operating in small teams and sometimes in austere locations, SOF missions can directly affect

objectives at the strategic and operational levels. In addition, SOF missions are occasionally executed in politically sensitive environments that add to the gravity of why they need to understand all aspects of the complex operational environment. The nature of their profession requires SOF officers to be representatives of the military and at times to become ambassadors on behalf of the United States. SOF officers are taught from the beginning of their training diverse tasks that are quite different from their conventional officers. The core tasks of SOF explain the unique missions they perform and emphasize why they need an education program based around their needs. Understanding some of the tasks SOF officers conduct differently than conventional forces will lend more insight as to why they need a specialized education program. US Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF) Manual (FM) 3.05 describes the core tasks.⁶

Unconventional warfare is a form of warfare that usually involves the cooperation of indigenous or surrogate personnel and their resources, coupled with United States Government assets, to defeat a State, an occupying force, or non-State actors.

Foreign Internal Defense (FID) is conducted by assessing, training, advising, and assisting host nation military and paramilitary forces with tasks that require unique capabilities. The goal is to enable these forces to maintain the host nation's internal stability, to counter subversion and violence in their country, and to address the causes of instability.

Direct Action is short-duration strikes and other small scale offensive actions conducted as a special operation in hostile, denied, or politically sensitive environments and that employ specialized military capabilities to seize, destroy, capture, exploit, recover, or damage designated targets.

Special Reconnaissance is reconnaissance and surveillance actions conducted as a special operation in hostile, denied, or politically sensitive environments to collect or verify information of strategic or operational significance, employing military capabilities to supplement other conventional reconnaissance and surveillance actions.

Counterterrorism operations are operations that include the offensive measures taken to prevent, deter, preempt, and respond to terrorism. These operations may be denied to conventional forces because of the political or threat conditions.

Psychological Operations are planned operations to convey selected information and indicators to foreign audiences to influence their emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and ultimately the behavior of foreign governments, organizations, groups, and individuals.

Civil Affairs Operations establish, maintain, influence, or exploit relations between military forces and civil authorities (government and nongovernment) and the civilian populace in a friendly, neutral, or hostile area of operations to facilitate military operations and to consolidate operational objectives.

Counterproliferation of weapons of mass destruction are actions taken to locate, seize, destroy, render safe, capture, or recover WMDs.

The core tasks of ARSOF provide a clearer picture of what its missions are and identify some underlying themes. These themes lead to the reason for an education program for SOF. Most of the core tasks require a SOF officer to cooperate with personnel from a foreign country to understand how to use civilian and military agencies to assist in the mission, and the ability to operate among various cultures to achieve mission success. Combining the core tasks with some of the ARSOF imperatives, such as to understand the operational environment, recognize political implications, facilitate interagency activities, and apply capabilities indirectly, it becomes apparent the underlying theme is the SOF officer's ability to work with all of these factors.⁷ Reviewing the education programs for SOF officers becomes a necessity in order to ensure they are receiving proper instruction that is conducive with their career.

SOF officers receive limited amounts of specialized education at the major level since most of the officers attend traditional professional military education. In today's military

education system, the focus of intermediate level education is to teach all officers, regardless of branch, a standard educational curriculum. The education at the major level provides officers with broad topics so they receive a general understanding of how the military operates in today's operational environment. Institutions use a variety of historical and contemporary military examples to teach students. The services do an excellent job to educate all officers that will enhance their knowledge of the military; however, a certain group of officers requires a different kind of education to address their needs. SOF professionals deal with a range of areas that are not normally taught in education programs. Understanding the military and its operation is important to all officers, but SOF officers need additional classes and programs that will strengthen the specific abilities used in their profession. The recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan underscore the necessity for SOF officers to maximize their time and education while at school.

Education requirements for SOF officers

There are not specific educational requirements for SOF officers at this time; they have the same education standard as conventional officers within each service. SOF officers do provide a unique capability to the military and creating an education program to develop SOF officers does not fall solely on the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM). USSOCOM is a geographical combatant command and is concerned with improving the education of its SOF officers; however, it does not have its own major level education program similar to the services. USSOCOM does assist special operations commands from the services to help their officers attain education through various means. The services provide education to the officer by sending him to his service specific institution unless the officer competes for an school seat at another service. SOF officers at the major level will stay within their services to meet education requirements for promotion and selection criteria. USSOCOM does have legal

authorities and responsibilities for educating its force. Developing an academic program becomes tricky, especially when considering the services already have institutions providing education for SOF officers. Some may look at this and wonder why USSOCOM has not put more emphasis on educating SOF officers, while others may look at why it has taken so long for the services to address education programs for SOF officers. USSOCOM Commander does understand the importance of education among its officers and looks to Joint Special Operations University (JSOU) to provide options as to how SOCOM can provide education to officers within SOF.⁸ The importance of educating the force prompted an independent study in June 2005 by Booz Allen Hamilton that examined, analyzed, and surveyed officers and education programs within SOF to collect data for improvements to education for SOF personnel.⁹ The study by Booz Allen Hamilton determined that “USSOCOM is successfully training the force and JSOU plays a significant role, but neither the command nor service nor joint professional military education institutions and programs are sufficiently preparing mid- and senior-level SOF leaders at the appropriate times in an individual’s career for the operational or strategic challenges of the GWOT.”¹⁰ Some of the important topics raised from the study for JSOU to focus on in the years ahead are: 1) finding ways to deliver education through distance learning, 2) courses on interagency cultures, processes, and procedures, 3) establishing fellowship programs, and 4) plan for a formal program to fund education.¹¹ Perhaps the Booz Allen Hamilton report released in 2005 did in fact help the special operations commands articulate to their respective services the types of educational requirements SOF officers need to build upon skills in the academic environment. Most of the topics mentioned in 2005 are in some form incorporated in professional military education curriculums now, or have been developed, such as the Army’s Interagency Fellowship Program. However, is there a better way to incorporate

themes such as interagency, foreign language training, and cultural competence into a single education program for SOF officers? One way of examining some of the topics is by using Army programs as an example. The Army provides academic programs for SOF officers that include interagency cooperation and cultural competence. This is one indication of SOF education getting the attention it deserves within the services.

Comparison of Army program for SOF officers

The Army recognizes that SF majors need a different kind of education from their conventional peers and has made some strides to address SF schooling programs.¹ Each program offers advantages and disadvantages to an SF officer's career profession. For instance, cultural awareness and language proficiency are skills associated with SF and some institutions teach those skills. These key skills are essential when a SF officer conducts operations within a foreign country and are important to understand. Just as important is having a grasp of how interagency organizations support the SF officer and the mission. Educational programs within the Army do address these three areas but none of the programs emphasizes these three areas in a single educational program. Creating an academic program that centers on the interagency while officers can improve upon their cultural awareness and language proficiency is a better alternative. There are fellowships and service education programs in existence that incorporate these aspects that do provide SOF officers an opportunity to enhance their knowledge. Taking a closer look at several of these programs will help to understand the composition of this additional educational option.

Several educational programs address essential assets that SOF officers can utilize to receive a nontraditional education. These programs are a good opportunity for officers to focus

¹ SOF is a collection of personnel from different services or branches that serve within the SOF community or have a specialty that considers them special operations. Special Forces is a branch within the Army that is a part of SOF.

on aspects of education that will enhance their knowledge. One of the programs is the Olmstead Foundation Scholarship. The Olmsted Foundation Scholarship provides an opportunity for SOF officers to receive its education through immersion. The article, *Unconventional Education: SOF officers and the Olmsted Foundation Scholarship*, describes the benefits of SOF officers receiving education abroad.¹² The Olmsted Scholar Program selects officers to attend a university overseas to earn a master's degree. While earning a master's degree, an officer will improve his language skills by speaking the language everyday, which will make it easier for the officer to learn the culture. SOF officers work in environments that require them to understand the history of a culture and be able to communicate effectively in that language. Through diplomacy, SOF officers can assist in achieving strategic goals. An advantage of the Olmstead program is the officer will exchange thoughts and ideas with fellow classmates in an academic environment and engage in the society outside of class. The SOF officer will understand different viewpoints on world issues concerning that country. This program also fosters an environment that forges relationships with foreign students that someday may be useful in future assignments. This provides great dividends to the SOF community but does not address the importance of a relationship with interagency partners. The program falls short in providing SOF student with academic classes such as counterinsurgency (COIN) and other specific SOF core competences classes. Instruction in COIN and the SOF core competences is not the purpose of this program, but it would be beneficial for a SOF student. During the time the officer is overseas, the student must maintain his SOF skills through the computer, which is not an effective way to remain proficient in SOF skills and tasks.

Another alternative academic program designed for SOF officers seeks to educate its students through a SOF specific curriculum with a focus on understanding interagency partners.

The article, *Opportunities for ARSOF: Education at Fort Leavenworth*, describes a new program in which SOF officers enroll in a SOF academic track at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, that also leads to a master's degree.¹³ The SOF program is in addition to the intermediate level education (ILE) program at Fort Leavenworth given to all field grade officers. The SOF studies program incorporates academics that focus on core competencies of SOF along with seminar discussions from SOF experts to prepare respective students for future special operations assignments. The faculty for the program is under the direction of the SOF education element at Fort Leavenworth that provides relevant curriculum from history along with references to SOF students. The program also invites guest speakers and conducts case studies and exercises that provide SOF students with a vast collection of knowledge. In addition to the SOF program, SOF officers will receive a master's degree in Interagency Studies that is integrated into the ILE curriculum. The master's degree program comes with no additional cost to the student. Making the master's program a part of the curriculum benefits SOF officers since the majority, if not all, of the master's programs offered at ILE require students to pay extra or take tuition's assistance. Another benefit of the SOF program and the master's degree in the ILE academic year is that it allows many SOF students the opportunity to spend time with families rather than taking many additional masters' classes at night. The interagency studies program gives SOF students the opportunity to gain more knowledge and a better understanding of interagency partners. Gaining this knowledge will allow SOF officers to use any interagency partner effectively while on an assignment. This SOF program is an improvement and assists SOF officers in many facets of a SOF specific education; however, it does not address cultural awareness or language proficiency.

The Army began a recent fellowship program in which officers will work with a federal agency in Washington, DC. The Interagency Fellowship Program (IFP) is an effort by the

Army's Command and General Staff College to allow a selected group of officers the opportunity to build a relationship with an interagency organization.¹⁴ The fellowship also meets the major level schooling requirement for the officer. To meet the schooling requirement for the Army, the officer will attend a three month Intermediate Level Education (ILE) common core instruction at Fort Belvoir, Maryland. The officer will complete the remainder of ILE through a distance learning program within eighteen months. Upon completion of the common core instruction, the officer is assigned to a federal agency for approximately one year. Daily exposure to an interagency will educate the officer on the agency's mission, techniques, tactics, and procedures while expanding upon the officer's expertise. A SF officer, Captain Bryan Gibb stated, "serving as an Army interagency fellow is both an outstanding professional development opportunity and an excellent mechanism for imparting company-grade officer's tactical and operational level experiences to members of a national level organization."¹⁵ This kind of experience is the right approach to educating SF officers. The purpose of the fellowship meets the Army's intent to integrate officers within the interagency. This program in part meets the intent of the Commander, United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) guidance to Joint Special Operations University (JSOU) to establish the USSOCOM Interagency Education Program.¹⁶ IFP is quite promising, but there are still questions remaining to be answered. The article does not mention the impact the fellowship has in relation to completing the distance learning portion of ILE or the possibility of incorporating a master's degree producing distance learning program. One of the main complaints about distance learning is having enough time to complete the education while conducting one's job, or fellowship, in this case. Captain Gibb does state this program is a great mechanism; however, is there an opportunity to incorporate

classes on cultural awareness and language? Given the promising direction of this fellowship there are additional issues to consider.

Results of comparison

An alternative academic program combining portions of the three existing programs together with a length of two years is the best arrangement. The program is similar to the Interagency Fellowship model with extras. The officer will fulfill the educational requirement through distance learning that may produce a master's degree. The advantage of assigning the officer to a two-year tour is to provide the officer more flexibility to incorporate cultural awareness and language training opportunities. An option to support the language portion can model the Air Force's Air Command and Staff College (ACSC) language program by utilizing language contractors from the Washington, DC area through Defense Language Institute (DLI). In an interview with a German instructor at ACSC, Mr. Harald Ritzau stated that DLI uses the Washington, DC based company, International Center for Language Studies (ILCS), to help officers with language training.¹⁷ The benefits of the interagency experience expose the officer to different government capabilities and programs that will provide additional methods for learning a culture. To further cultural education, creating the option for the interagency to send an officer on a temporary duty status to a United States Embassy or an immersion to a foreign country for several weeks might be possible. This provides the officer hands on experience within a culture while working on foreign language skills. This alternative program enables the officer to capitalize on existing education opportunities with less relocation and the ability to stay relevant within the SOF community through daily, weekly, or monthly communication. It builds an officer's relationship with the interagency while becoming more culturally aware, improving on language proficiency, and fulfilling educational requirements with the potential of earning a

master's degree all in one program. The alternative education program has benefits for SOF officers. Exploring Army regulations and policies to determine if Army SF officers can realistically attend such a program is a crucial first step.

Supporting distance learning from another service

An important part in determining whether Army SF officers can enroll in a distance learning program offered by another service is understanding the Army's position on the issue. Distance learning programs in the Army are a possible option for officers to meet the education requirement as a major. Until recently, officers wanting to enroll in military distance learning programs or nonresident instruction were limited to courses offered by the Army. A recent change in the verbiage concerning nonresident schools and instruction offers the possibility for an officer to attend a nonresident school from another service that would be more flexible than the Army's current distance learning program. The verbiage change is in Department of the Army Pamphlet (DA PAM) 600-3, Commissioned Officer Professional and Career Education, that states, "Officers will not enroll in other than Army schools without written approval from Human Resources Command (HRC) and the Army G3/5/7, Director of Training."¹⁸ This recent change in the regulation is as of 1 February 2010. This statement implies that an officer can attend a sister service school's distance learning program once gaining the approval from HRC and the Army G3/5/7, Director of Training. While the Army's distance learning program is sufficient for "on-the-job" education program, the ability to have options will create more flexibility for the officer. In an interview with Mr. Jack Kendall, Deputy Chief of Leader Development from the Army Human Resources Command in Alexandria, Virginia, he discussed some of the issues with all Army competitive category officers attending intermediate level education. Until tested, officers requesting to enroll in a sister service's distance learning

program and gaining approval will be unclear.¹⁹ Trying to determine acceptable parameters of what circumstances will allow officers to attend a distance learning program from a sister service will be on hold until more data can be obtained. By allowing an Army major to attend a sister service distance learning program is a win-win situation for Army officers, Army SF officers, and sister service nonresident programs.

One main reason distance learning through another service is a win-win situation is it would make ILE seats available to more officers. Mr. Kendall confirmed the Army is experiencing a backlog of officers waiting to attend ILE. A reason for the backlog of officers waiting to attend ILE is because the Army did away with selecting only the top 50% of a year group's officers to attend ILE. Going from selecting only the top half of a year group to universal ILE, where every Army officer will attend ILE, runs into the issue of only having so many seats available per ILE class and trying to get every officer to ILE. There are two start dates for ILE every year: summer and fall. With only a limited amount of seats per class to fill with officers, the alternate education program using a sister service ILE will create another option for select Army majors to complete the education requirement.

The Army is currently trying to solve the backlog of officers through different academic avenues. Options the Army is using in addition to the 10-month resident ILE course at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, include sending Army majors to resident sister service institutions, using the 14-week satellite core course for select officers, and blended learning. This blended learning allows officers to attend the 14-week satellite core course and finish the remainder of ILE through distance learning. One of the challenges of the Army's distance learning program is that officers are required to meet online at a specific time and date with the instructor and fellow students. This poses a problem when the officer is still conducting his daily duties within an

organization and is having difficulties with the distance learning program because it is not very flexible. The Army also sends its officers to fellowships, internships, and academic programs like National Defense Intelligence College (NDIC) and NPS to try to cut down on the backlog of officers attending resident ILE. Officers attending a fellowship or internship will still have to complete some form of ILE, whether through the 14-week satellite course or Army distance learning.

One constraint with the Army is it wants officers to participate in some form of their ILE education, in residence or distance learning. Stating that limitation, a possible course of action for an Army officer to partake in a sister service distance learning program would be to complete the Army 14-week satellite core course and then complete the sister service distance learning program. This course of action may lead to more time and requirements for the officer to complete in limited time. With the right distance learning program the length of the entire education may not be significantly long. Knowing the parameters of the regulation of what is an acceptable request and what is not acceptable will give further understanding of how to meet the intent of the regulation. This will give SF officers the greatest amount of success when requesting to attend a sister service's distance learning program. As stated above, the most important benefit for allowing an Army officer to enroll in a sister service's distance learning program is it creates another option for Army officers, not only SF officers, to meet the education requirement at the major level and reduce the backlog of officers waiting to attend resident ILE. An impressive distance learning program is the Air Force's Air Command and Staff College (ACSC) online master's program.

Incorporating a distance learning program

The ACSC online master's program (OLMP) meets the intent and fulfills an important criterion in the alternative education program for SOF officers. The ACSC OLMP started in 2007 and is modeled after the resident Air Command and Staff curriculum. One of the most important aspects of this program is the flexibility it gives an officer to complete the weekly education requirements while having the ability to conduct normal day-to-day demands of one's job. An Air Force pilot and graduate of the OLMP, Major Daniel McLagen, completed the course in approximately 18 months and said, "the program is flexible enough for folks to take a hiatus and then return."²⁰ This comment emphasizes the importance of having flexibility while completing a distance learning program. Breaking down the components of the ACSC OLMP will show why this is a program to pursue for SOF majors.

The course design facilitates a desire to learn while maintaining the rigors of a demanding major level program. In an interview with the Dean of ACSC's Distance Learning program, Dr. Bart Kessler explained the concept and methodology behind the OLMP. There are eleven courses offered to the student during a period or term.²¹ The courses offered are Leadership In Warfare, International Security Studies, Applied Warfare Studies, Joint Forces, Air, Space and Cyberspace Studies, Research 1, Research 2, Regional/ Cultural Studies, Joint Planning, Joint Air Operations, and Practice of Command. The course provides a "resident-like experience delivered globally" which is true to its name.²² The course is structured so the officer completes one course during an eight-week period and each course completed counts as three credit hours. There is not a specific order to take the courses so the officer can determine when he prefers to take each course. The officer begins by taking a class for an eight week period and each week starts a new topic for the students. On Monday, the students receive a lesson

containing reading material, videos, and other content that will help the student's understanding of the discussion topic for that week. The instructor posts a question to each student based on the reading assignments and the officer must respond to the question within 150-300 words. The initial response and two additional responses are part of the "threaded discussion requirement" that the officer will be graded on. The officer can submit his initial response at any time during the week, however, it is recommended to start the initial discussion by the middle of the week in order to have time to respond to other officers within the online seminar. The officer must also take mid-term and final examinations for each course. Each week the officer can expect to devote 10-15 hours per week to read all the material in the lesson, including the required online responses. Once the officer completes the eight-week course, he then can choose another course for the next eight weeks. After the officer completes three courses, a student can decide to take two courses per the eight-week period instead of just one. This allows the officer to speed up the completion time for the entire OLMP. If an officer only decides to take one course per period, the student will complete the OLMP in approximately 22 months. If the officer decides to take two classes or "double up" after the initial three courses, the officer can complete the course in as little as 16 months.

The flexibility of the ACSC OLMP has great advantages to support the alternative education for SOF majors. The OLMP executes the entire curriculum every eight weeks throughout the year which allows the student to gain confidence while progressing through the program. In contrast with the resident program that starts every August, the officer can start the program at any time during the year as long as he meets the registration deadline. The instructors teaching the courses come from various backgrounds ranging from contractors, reserve component, resident ACSC course instructors, and college professors with military

backgrounds. The diversity of the instructors and their backgrounds create an academic environment in which the student can feel confident about the experience and knowledge level of the program. Accessing the course material from the experience course instructors is not a burden while enrolled in the OLMP.

The ease of access to the online courses and threads do not pose a constraint to the students. The program does not require the student to have a military account to access the computer content, and it only requires a high-speed internet access. In other words, a student does not have to be tied to a .mil computer or account, meaning that an officer does not have to log into a military account to access the online master's program. The officer can access the program at anytime and anywhere, while on vacation, temporary duty, and deployed. As long as there is internet access, a student can contribute to the course.

Another flexible attribute this program offers officers is the ability to take off for an eight-week period. For instance, if the officer has upcoming duty location responsibilities that will preclude him from devoting the proper amount of time to the eight-week course, he can elect to opt out of that period. This is extremely beneficial for the student and specifically in the case of the "on-the-job" education program. If the student in the alternative education program is coming upon language immersion training in another country, the officer has the option to defer his OLMP course. Most importantly, the OLMP satisfies the military education requirement for majors. Not only will an officer get military education credit but also the OLMP is a Joint Professional Military Education Phase I recognized course. In addition, the ACSC OLMP is a master's degree producing school that is accredited from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. There is not a need to take additional courses to earn a master's degree because the requirements for a master's degree are included in the curriculum distance learning program.

While there are advantages to officers enrolling in the OLMP, some issues need to be resolved in order to make this program available to all SOF officers.

While the ACSC OLMP benefits officers enrolled in the course, some impediments will preclude this from working with the proposed “on-the-job” education program. First, the ACSC OLMP is not open to officers from the sister services. The ACSC OLMP is only open to Air Force (USAF) personnel and civilians. Second, while the course is beneficial, it is still relatively new and while only three years removed from its start, the OLMP is still working through having appropriate attendance levels. Officers from the sister services may help the ACSC OLMP by providing more participants which would be a win-win situation for the OLMP and majors. The third issue revolves around funding. Who pays for the sister service officer to enter the program, the USAF or the sister service? Additionally, the USAF does not have an additional duty service obligation for those officers who enroll and complete the program. Since select SOF officers would attend the “on-the-job” education program, there may be a push to add a service commitment to the program and OLMP, or both. These factors do pose some problems, but the main point is the OLMP meets the criteria providing a flexible online academic program for an Army SF officer to complete the military education requirement. The next portion of the program involves delivering language and culture aspects that the officer in the “on-the-job” education program can benefit from.

Language training and cultural competence

The language and cultural training portion of the alternative education program can come to fruition in several ways. The intent of the foreign language training for the officers is to build upon the foreign language skills they have currently. A requirement to pass Special Forces Qualification Course is obtaining a minimum 1/1 (reading and listening score) on the Defense

Language Proficiency Test (DLPT), so SF students will begin with a good framework for language study.²³ The expectation over the course of the training associated with the “on-the-job” education is to build and maintain their foreign language skills and not to make them fluent speakers. The course will get them more familiar at speaking, reading, and writing which will give the officer more confidence in the foreign language while serving overseas. The cultural competence training functions together with language training. While an officer is learning a language, the program intends to provide opportunities for the officer to travel abroad or attend isolated training in the United States. Language opportunities are plentiful, and comparing some of the programs will determine several options to incorporate into the “on-the-job” education program.

The Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC) located in Washington, DC, is the military’s foreign language institute set up to aid military personnel in language skills.²⁴ Military personnel located on the US East Coast can attend DLIFLC in Washington, DC to fulfill their foreign language training requirements. DLIFLC will coordinate for instructors and training, and students will receive a \$750.00 allowance. This money is only for students in a year or longer training program. The allowance offsets the costs of paying for additional books and materials needed for the course. DLIFLC-Washington offers programs that require students to commit to a five day a week foreign language training for a set number of weeks. They do not have a one-on-one individual program within their course that may meet a specific need of the alternate education program. However, DLIFLC Washington is flexible enough to accommodate an officer attending a longer course that may be a viable option. There are flexible language instruction options that will work around a student’s schedule.

The International Center for Language Studies (ILCS) is located in Washington, DC, and is a company US military personnel or commands can use to train its personnel in a foreign language. ILCS teaches virtually every foreign language and has a staff of instructors that fulfill a student's language needs. Mrs. Ania Halbrooke coordinates language contracts for the ILCS and is familiar with training military personnel and individual instruction.²⁵ According to her, individual instruction is rare, but ILCS can provide the service. ICLS offers a very flexible program to accommodate any schedule, and some instructors are willing to work on the weekends. Each session is at least two hours long containing two lessons that are fifty minutes each. ILCS requires a mandatory minimum of 30 hours to begin foreign language training. The meeting schedule is very flexible, in which a student can have the option to meet several times a week or once every two weeks. It is important to note the instruction is based off the hours, not the number of classes, because a student may have other requirements and may have to cancel a session but retains the hours. The key is flexibility with no training time lost. The cost for the instructor is \$46.00 per hour. Students are required to pay a registration fee of \$75.00 and purchase any books or additional learning material for the course. Using ICLS as an outside source is a great option if commands are willing to fund and support the training. Special operations commands within each service also have the option to coordinate with USSOCOM to assist with language and culture training.

The USSOCOM provides another option for officers to get foreign language and culture training. The office within USSOCOM's J7/9, Directorate for Training, Knowledge, and Futures that assists with language training is the SOF Culture and Language Office (SOFCLLO). In an interview with Mr. Jack Donnelly, Director, SOF Culture and Language Office, he discussed ways SOFCLLO can provide support to organizations pursuing culture and language training.²⁶

SOFCLLO uses several different approaches to help SOF personnel learn a foreign language. The officer's service component will determine how much flexibility the officer has in setting up a language training program. The different training tools SOFCLLO uses to help an officer with foreign language training vary from one-on-one instruction to computer-based applications. There are four ways SOFCLLO assists individuals and units to get foreign language training.

First of all, SOCOM has an umbrella training services contract that SOFCLLO can use to support language and culture training. Under the training service contract, units and schools can order language and culture training on a task order basis. The training services contract is beneficial because of the range of language and culture training options it provides an officer. For example, units and schools can buy instructor hours and determine the curriculum and location, Live Environment Training (LET) in-country immersion events send students into actual foreign nations to live with a foreign family, attend classes, and tour relevant sites in the area. LET gives the student the opportunity to learn in an environment and in a classroom setting using only the foreign language and literally forces language production. This is an opportunity the officer can use if the interagency grants it because he can take the eight week break during ACSC OLMP. There are a number of countries that are closed to LETs but a similar experience can be manufactured in what is called an iso-immersion. The vendor creates a foreign language experience within the United States and plugs students into it. Students are "isolated" from American culture and language and immersed in the target language and culture.²⁷ An effective means of doing this is to locate an enclave of the target culture and language within the United States and set up events, classes and lodging there to replicate the target area.

Secondly, SOFCLO will support continuing education ranging from beginner through advanced. The continuing education program teaches foreign language to personnel using web, video-conferencing technology. Students use a commercial internet connection in which one or more students will meet online with an instructor. The online program SOFCLO recommends is the Special Operations Forces Teletraining System (SOFTS).²⁸ SOFTS creates a virtual classroom where students interact with fellow students and the instructor. Classes are on set schedules but service components can tailor the program to fit an officer's specific needs. Service components have the ability to arrange this program to be flexible for the officer and in some cases offer one-on-one training with the student and instructor. Results have shown the web video conferencing course to be as effective as traditional in-class instruction with mature students.

Another way SOFCLO can support an officer is by sending them to a local college, such as Georgetown University that offers a foreign language course within the Washington, DC area. SOFCLO will fund the tuition for an officer to attend a course at a college as long as the course is not for SOF specific personnel. For officers wanting to take a foreign language course at a college, SOFCLO prefers them to use tuition's assistance (TA). All services have TA and an officer can use TA for language training purposes without the course relating to a degree program. One caveat with using TA is there is an active duty service obligation associated with its use. An officer must consider weighing additional service time with the benefits of attending a language course at a college.

Finally, SOFCLO does have the ability to fund language training through DLIFLC Washington. An officer studying in a classroom with other students does have its benefits and the program is for a shorter duration, sometimes as little as four weeks. Incorporating DLIFLC

into an officer's schedule may be difficult due to duty constraints, but it is an option that could work. Two items to mention are that SOCOM's language programs are available to noncommissioned officers and warrants as well, but the first stop is the unit or Service component language program if they cannot support your training needs then contact SOFCLO. SOFCLO presents several programs for an officer and his service component to obtain foreign language training while structuring the training to meet the officer's language requirement. SOFCLO language training options are beneficial because of the flexibility it gives to the officer while working at an interagency and completing a distance learning program.

An alternate method to get language training for an officer is through an organization that will directly fund the training. Traditionally, the only officers required and funded to receive language training were those required by branch (such as SF), foreign area officers, officers assigned to a modified table of organization & equipment (MTOE) or table of distribution and allowances (TDA) position requiring language proficiency or through necessity, (for example, a deployment). Each service has a dedicated amount of money to maintain language proficiency for their personnel. Mr. Mark Getzin, from Army Intelligence Office (G2), indicates their funding is through The Army Language Program (TALP), which is focused on sustaining and maintaining professional linguists, e.g. military intelligence officers, civil affairs officers, and foreign area officers.²⁹³⁰ TALP will not fund personnel trying to acquire a new language, which SF officers are not. There does not seem to be a specific language fund used for individuals trying to obtain language training, e.g. to support officers in the "on-the-job" education program. Mr. Getzin did describe that Army Human Resources Command does have hours that it can use at Defense Language Institute – Washington, DC to train personnel needing language training. Special Forces officers may or may not be able to use HRC language hours because of the status

the officer is in while in the interagency fellowship. However, there are ways to obtain funds that will assist getting an officer language training.

An option to obtain language training is by requesting it through a Standard Form 182, Authorization, Agreement, and Certification of Training. The SF 182 serves as a contract tool in order to coordinate language and culture training, but only an authorized command with funds can actually get language training. An organization can directly contract the language school or company that will meet the foreign language training requirements providing the organization has the funding. One must get a fund site and approval for language instruction from an organization that will pay the costs for an officer to attend the training. The form will then go to the contracting office of the company or agency for approval. Writing the contract so the instruction is set on a number of hours, not number of classes, will allow for greater flexibility in the foreign language training should the officer have to reschedule. Another benefit of writing the contract in terms of hours vice classes is the company will honor the contract if the training crosses over two fiscal years. A caveat to this course of action is articulating the language and culture course is for an officer that wants to sustain and maintain his language abilities. There is a different process when requesting funds to assist an officer to acquire a language. Fortunately, most SF or SOF officers already have a working knowledge of a language. This will hopefully avoid any confusion when trying to contract for language training. The potential for an officer to sustain and build upon foreign language skills from an instructor is accessible. In addition to receiving formal instruction, there are informal options for an officer to increase foreign language and cultural competence through military programs.

As stated above, the potential for an officer to travel abroad and experience the culture and foreign language is possible. As an additional learning tool, sending an officer to a foreign

country will incorporate the skills learning through foreign language training while getting living in the country. While the student is attending the “on-the-job” education with an interagency and increasing his foreign language skills, this event would combine the knowledge to accentuate the purpose of the SOF school. One of the requirements to take into account is the officer must get a country clearance to travel abroad that may take some time to approve. One of the benefits of the immersion program is the officer has the opportunity to reside in a home for the duration of the trip. One must recognize the potential dangers when travelling to another country for language training, such as becoming a target for surveillance. This may become more of a distracter to the learning objectives. Knowing this observation may result in less of an opportunity to travel to countries that speak languages relevant to current operations, i.e. Operation Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. The officer must get approval and the time necessary while under the fellowship to travel abroad for the immersion period. These options would add to the overall program and would be a great benefit to the officer. If the overseas immersion option cannot come to fruition, then the officer still can opt to conduct an in-country immersion as mentioned above. There are many options for an officer to include a language and culture training program while working at an interagency and completing the military education requirement.

Recommendation

The SOF “on-the-job” education program should be a pursuable course of action to educate SOF officers that would broaden their experience. Broadening an officer’s educational experience by working with an interagency, building upon language and cultural training meets the intent of this two year program. Using the Army’s Interagency Fellowship as a foundation for this program to fulfill the requirement for an officer to gain a better understanding of how the

interagency and the military operate together. In Major Guillaume Beaurpere's 2007 essay, *Educating Broadly: Rethinking Nontraditional Special Operations Forces Education*, he recommends other existing interagency scholarship programs such as the Fulbright Scholarship and CIA Undergrad Scholarship that are viable options in addition to the Army's Interagency Fellowship.³¹ Major Beaurpere supports the two year time frame and also recognizes the risk of losing an officer for two years of education.³² The two year time frame does facilitate the additional training of foreign language and cultural competence. The ability to use one of the foreign language training options while the officer is in the program will maximize the time to hone foreign language skills. The ACSC OLMP is a great program to include as part of the "on-the-job" education program. It does accomplish the major level military education requirement and the incentive of the officer having the opportunity to earn a master's degree. The ACSC OLMP is flexible enough so that the officer can determine how much work to do while working at the interagency. It will run parallel to the two years of the "on-the-job" education program so the pace of work does not become a burden or the officer cannot enjoy some family time. Family time is important, especially since the majority of SOF officers are constantly deployed or conducting training when they are not in a school environment. A consequence for an officer to attend a program like this is the lack of networking with fellow officers. This fact is important since one of the main benefits of attending a school with all of your peers is building a network that may come in use in the future situations. However, this program gives officers the flexibility to remain in contact with the SOF community and additionally with peers through a sister service nonresident program.

Gaining the approval from the Army to allow an officer to attend a sister service nonresident academic program is the first hurdle to achieve. One must also gain approval from

the Air Force to allow the officer to enroll in the distance learning program. While it is understandable to a degree why the services want to ensure that their officers attend academic programs within their service, the issues becomes finding the best way to provide education to officers. These two factors pose problems as first but the win-win scenario can help both services, it does appear to be a viable option. Addressing how to fund the program is another consideration to take into account. Funding plays an important role in how the “on-the-job” program along with foreign language and culture training will get support. A possibility could be to assign the officer in a student account while still receiving funds through the officer’s respective service. This option could facilitate funds coming from USSOCOM since they have a stake in the education of SOF officers.

Conclusion

Special operations forces officers need a different kind of education since the work they conduct is different from that done by conventional officers. Because SOF officers’ missions, roles, and competences are different, preparing officers through effective education to operate in these environments will only increase their capability. SOF officers must find solutions to difficult problems that involve coordination with interagency organizations, a thorough understanding of culture, and the ability to speak the language. There are academic programs that focus on one or two of these aspects, not all three teach about governmental agencies, cultural awareness and language training. Creating an alternative academic option for special operations officers would give an officer the time to build relationships with federal agencies while utilizing opportunities for language and cultural training. It is time to rethink how the military and SOF conducts its education for officers in the SOF community. The military is truly moving towards a joint effort to defeat enemies of our nation, and the military must think in joint

terms when it comes to education. By breaking down barriers of access to another service's education programs and other language and cultural courses that are more flexible and effective is one way of accomplishing this task. The 2010 QDR adds more weight for SOF getting training in these areas by stating "the Department is also adding \$14 million for language, regional expertise, and culture training for special operations forces."³³ Relying on SOF to perform some of these tasks cannot come from pre-deployment training alone but a comprehensive education program that adds these factors will only benefit this small force. The potential is great and can be a source to educate other special operations officers throughout all the services to include the prospect of educating warrant officers and noncommissioned officers through this program.³⁴ It is time to educate our SOF officers to be ready to meet current and future challenges with all the necessary tools available that will win the hearts and minds of people to achieve victory.

An academic program for SOF majors through "on-the-job" education is program that is relevant to current operations and is a career enhancing opportunity for SOF. SOF officers are a select breed of officers that are an important capability to our military force. Most of the education and training programs prior to the Global War on Terrorism focused on fighting a conventional enemy force, tank on tank scenario. The global environment has changed drastically and special operations continue to train to its specific tasks, the education for SOF officers has remained the same. The military must continue its progress at developing and incorporating more SOF specific education programs for this small, but increasingly important, group of specialized warriors. From the Army perspective, all the academic programs are in place to support the enhancement of education for SOF officers. By using the interagency fellowship as a foundation for the "on-the-job" education program of SOF officers, there is an

opportunity to create a program to increase the capabilities for SOF officers while improving their foreign language and cultural competence. This program maximizes the time an officer has to conduct professional military education with relevant and purposeful training while combining an opportunity to achieve a master's program. Academic programs must be flexible to provide an education that accentuates a SOF officer's ability to remain adaptive thinkers with all of the tools necessary to win.

¹ Tucker, David and Lamb, Christopher J. "United States Special Operations Command." Columbia University Press. New York. 2007. Pg 99.

² Tucker, David and Lamb, Christopher J. "United States Special Operations Command." Columbia University Press. New York. 2007. Pg 99.

³ Joint Publication (JP) 3-0. *Joint Operations*, 17 September 2006 (Incorporating Change 1, 13 February 2008). Pg. xx.

⁴ Office of the Secretary of Defense. *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, Washington DC, February 2010. Pg xiii.

⁵ Gibb, Cpt Bryan "Working Relationships. Interagency Exchange Program Improves Army's Relationship with Whole of Government." *Special Warfare* 22, no. 5 (September-October 2009): 6-7.

⁶ Field Manual (FM) 3-05. *Army Special Operations Forces*, 20 September 2006. Pgs. 2-1 – 2-6.

⁷ Field Manual (FM) 3-05. *Army Special Operations Forces*, 20 September 2006. Pgs. 1-13 – 1-14.

⁸ Joint Special Operations University, President's Action Team. "Providing the Azimuth for Joint SOF Education – The Future Direction of JSOU," Joint Special Operations University Future Concept paper, July 2008: ii.

⁹ Joint Special Operations University. "Educational Requirements Analysis for Academic Year 2005-2010," Executive Summary (VA: Booz Allen Hamilton, Inc.), 8 June 2005: ES-1.

¹⁰ Joint Special Operations University. "Educational Requirements Analysis for Academic Year 2005-2010," Executive Summary (VA: Booz Allen Hamilton, Inc.), 8 June 2005: ES-2.

¹¹ Joint Special Operations University. "Educational Requirements Analysis for Academic Year 2005-2010," Executive Summary (VA: Booz Allen Hamilton, Inc.), 8 June 2005: ES-7 – ES-11.

¹² Miani, Maj Lino, and Wisecup, LCDR Michael "Unconventional Education: SOF Officers and the Olmsted Foundation Scholarship." *Special Warfare* 22, no. 3 (May-June 2009): 23-25.

¹³ Spence, LtCol James W., and Lessard, Lt Col Casey “Opportunities for ARSOF: Education at Fort Leavenworth” *Special Warfare* 22, no. 1 (January-February 2009): 10-13.

¹⁴ Military Personnel Message 09-133. Issued 11 June 2009. US Army. To all eligible officers to attend Academic Year 2010 Intermediate Level Education (ILE) opportunities and procedures for applying to Foreign, Sister Service School and Interagency Fellowship Attendance, 11 June 2009.

¹⁵ Gibb, Cpt Bryan “Working Relationships. Interagency Exchange Program Improves Army’s Relationship with Whole of Government.” *Special Warfare* 22, no. 5 (September-October 2009): 6-7.

¹⁶ Joint Special Operations University, President’s Action Team. “Providing the Azimuth for Joint SOF Education – The Future Direction of JSOU,” Joint Special Operations University Future Concept paper, July 2008: 11.

¹⁷ Harald Ritzau (German language instructor at Air Command and Staff College), interview by the author, 4 December 2009.

¹⁸ Department of the Army Pamphlet (DA PAM) 600-3. *Commissioned Officer Professional Development and Career Management*, 1 February 2010. Pg. 26.

¹⁹ Mr. Jack Kendall (Army Human Resources Command Deputy Chief of Leader Development), interview by the author, 4 February 2010.

²⁰ Major Daniel J. McLagan, (graduate of the ACSC online master’s program), interview by the author, 9 February 2010.

²¹ Dr. Bart R. Kessler (Dean of ACSC online master’s program), interview by the author, 4 February 2010.

²² Kessler, Dr. Bart R. Dean, *ACSC Online Master’s Program (OLMP) Overview* (Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: Visual Education, 2010), slides.

²³ United States Army Recruiting Command (USAREC) Pamphlet 601-25. *In-Service Special Forces Recruiting Program (Officer and Enlisted)*, 25 April 2001. Pg. 2-4.

²⁴ Defense Language Institute (DLI) Foreign Language Center. “DLI Washington FAQ’s” <http://www.dliflc.edu/faq.html> (accessed 1 February 2010).

²⁵ Mrs. Ania Halbrook (language coordinator for International Center for Language Studies), interview by the author, 2 February 2010.

²⁶ Mr. Jack Donnelly (Director of Special Operations Language and Cultures for USSOCOM), interview by the author, 10 February 2010.

²⁷ Mr. Jack Donnelly (Director of Special Operations Language and Cultures for USSOCOM), interview by the author, 10 February 2010.

²⁸ Special Operations Forces Teletraining System. “What is SOFTS”. <https://www.softsonline.org/WhatisSOFTS/tabid/69/Default.aspx> (accessed 6 February 2010).

²⁹ Mr. Mark Getzin (Intelligence Specialist. Army Foreign Language Proponent Office, Army G2), interview by the author, 10 March 2010.

³⁰ Army Regulation (AR) 11-6. *Army Foreign Language Program*, 31 August 2009. Pg 10.

³¹ Beaurpere, Maj Guillaume N. "Educating Broadly: Rethinking Nontraditional Special Operations Forces Education." *2007 JSOU and NDIA SO/LIC Division Essays*. JSOU Report 07-5. 2007: Pg 64.

³² Beaurpere, Maj Guillaume N. "Educating Broadly: Rethinking Nontraditional Special Operations Forces Education." *2007 JSOU and NDIA SO/LIC Division Essays*. JSOU Report 07-5. 2007: Pg 63.

³³ Office of the Secretary of Defense. *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, Washington DC, February 2010. Pg 29.

³⁴ Special Forces Career Notes. Professional Development. *Special Warfare* 22, no. 5 (September-October 2009): Pg 25.

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